

# South Jersey's Best

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## South Jersey's Top Towns 2009

**...From the pages of South Jersey Magazine...**

What's the hottest town in South Jersey? It's Haddonfield, according to South Jersey Magazine's inaugural Top 25 Towns ranking, which rated the towns across the publication's Burlington, Camden and Gloucester County market area.



Famous for dinosaurs (Hadrosaurus), Colonial history (the Indian King Tavern) and its contribution to popular culture and film, Haddonfield pulled ahead of Moorestown and Voorhees in the statistical compilation. Moorestown topped a breakout top-10 list for Burlington County, while the spotlight was on Harrison for a similar Gloucester County subset.

"The towns you expected to show up did. These are towns with good, strong credentials," says Steven Zweig, a New York-based statistician hired by South Jersey Magazine to produce the rankings from a range of data provided. "There were some towns that had some above-average crime rates that were in the top 25. (But) the educational factors were so strong, that's what made them appear."

The ranking was based on an examination of average residential property values in the three-county area, average property taxes paid, crime rates and the quality of schools. The ranking also controlled for population, setting 8,000 and above as a cutoff for the overall picture. However, an additional subset ranking of the top 10 small towns, with populations at 7,000 or below but above 1,500 the chosen threshold, was produced off the overall analysis of data.

Additionally, school quality was expressed as a composite score derived from data that included average SAT scores; the number of advanced placement tests offered; and the percentage of students who scored as proficient on the statewide 11th-grade test required for high school graduation. A low composite score reflects a quality school system.

Crime rates were expressed as a percentage of the number of crimes reported per 1,000 people. All of the factors were used to create a composite score for the towns, for which a low score was considered better, and the resulting scores yielded the rankings.

Zweig points to the education score as interesting, with towns that did well also reflecting comparatively inexpensive average property values. "Those could potentially be good investment opportunities. The crime rates were low, too," he says.

## **Home Sweet Haddonfield**

It's not easy being Haddonfield.

This graceful, 2.5-square-mile community of just over 11,000 residents, located in the heart of Camden County, is a model, many believe, for "living life the way it was meant to be."

Even in these days of festering cynicism and doubt, Haddonfield remains the real deal. Only Moorestown and Princeton, in this region, can approximate results for just the right mix of historic, Colonial-era charm and modern day convenience. When you get it right, it's an elixir for the soul.

Haddonfield Mayor Letitia Colombi is rightfully proud. "If you could sit down and describe a perfect town where you would like to live, it would be Haddonfield, New Jersey," she says. "All of the quality-of-life issues that we look for in a place – to raise and educate a family, to shop, to entertain ourselves – are found in Haddonfield.

"What people find when they move to Haddonfield is a real community," she explains. "When you come here, you are immediately accepted into the fold." Haddonfield residents have always set the bar high. First, when the Haddon Family originally established the town in 1695 as a haven for religious freedom, on a 500-acre tract of land. Then, in 1777, when New Jersey declared its freedom from England at the Indian King Tavern Inn. Then again, many years later, when the borough applied for and passed the first historic preservation ordinance in New Jersey

Kings Highway runs through the center of town, originally a wagon trail, but wide enough so "the kings army" could march down it. It remains the main artery today, and the core of Haddonfield's historic town center. The tree-lined boulevard anchors four blocks of narrow, three-story colonial-era structures with large-windowed storefronts of all variety. There are over 200 businesses in town, 25 of which have been there for 20 years or longer.

Haddonfield is predominantly for pedestrians. You can walk everywhere. Its antique-style streetlights are decorated with hanging flowerpots in the spring and Christmas wreaths in the winter. A clock tower punctuates the town center. There is a stone marker dated 1773 that proclaims "5 miles to Glou." And a duck-billed Hadrosaur statue commemorates the discovery in Haddonfield in 1858, of the first full skeleton of a dinosaur ever found in North America.

"I can't tell you how many times I have been out and people have come up and told me how they were looking to relocate, drove down our Main Street, and said 'wow,' let's buy a home here," Mayor Colombi says.

Haddonfield is dry, but always eager to party. First Night is Haddonfield's very own version of a New Year's Eve bash. Now in its 12th year, residents and visitors alike are treated each year to a unique, alcohol-free, outdoor event that features several fireworks displays, and over 40 separate venues with music and assorted other street performers.

The Haddonfield Arts & Crafts Festival is held every year in July when Kings Highway is closed to traffic and tents are set up to host over 200 artists and their creations. An estimated 120,000 people participate annually in the two-day, weekend event. There is also an annual Fall Festival, and, during the month of December, the Christmas spirit is celebrated each Friday evening with candlelit shopping, horse-drawn wagon rides and lots of caroling.

Haddonfield is also a community of beautiful homes, many of either a Victorian or Colonial style, set on large, wooded lots that are impeccably landscaped and maintained. According to the most recent census, there are 4,500 households in Haddonfield, many of which are younger families with kids. Over 4,000 children participate in organized, community sports.

That should not be surprising, as one of the main attractions for Haddonfield residents is its schools. Recognized among the top-rated schools in the state, the borough sends 97 percent of its graduating, high school seniors on to college. An average of 20 graduates or so are accepted to Ivy League institutions each year.

“I think what people find when they come to Haddonfield, is that they have come to a real community,” Mayor Colombi says. “It is about supporting families from cradle to grave. We have families come here, they have their children here, they live here for 50 years, their children move back, and now their grandchildren are here.

“So what Haddonfield provides, most importantly, is the ability to sustain community relationships. When we live in a world where technology has taken over people’s lives, Haddonfield becomes a place where you live the way life is supposed to be.”

### **Next Stop, Moorestown**

Denise Di Stephan

A vibrant town center, strong school system, rich history and active volunteerism are the ties that bind in Moorestown.

Proximity to large job markets, an abundance of theatre and library programs, Wesley Bishop Memorial Field (an athletic field with artificial turf), nature and walking trails and hundreds of acres of open space are a few more reasons the township is considered a jewel in Burlington County.

And it’s the residents who keep it all humming, says Mayor Daniel Roccato. “We have a large, engaged group of volunteers,” says Roccato, a 15-year resident. “People know each other here. We have a very connected community where people help each other out.”

The township has also become more of a job market itself. In addition to Lockheed Martin, the largest private employer, there have been more offices, restaurants and stores opening up, Roccato says.

Roccato, owner of Quaker Wealth Management, an investment management company, works in town. The mayor says that unlike in the past, when most residents worked in

Philadelphia, now many work in town, or in Cherry Hill, Haddonfield, Mount Laurel, Princeton or Trenton.

Within the region, there are a number of jobs in the health care industry, and Moorestown will soon get a new, 150,000-square-foot outpatient care facility.

Moorestown's past is its prologue. The land had been home to the Lenni Lenape Indians before the town was founded by the Quakers in 1682, and Roccato says the township has preserved its Quaker values, along with its historical homes, buildings and neighborhoods, some of which are designated as state and national historic landmarks. The township has an active historical society that preserves landmarks and raises public awareness, Roccato said.

On Main Street, the social town center, there is the Perkins Center for the Arts, offering various art and dance programs and the Community House, a historic mansion renting space for meetings and events. Nearby on Main Street is the Moorestown Theatre Company, where adults and children can enroll to participate in productions.

### **Harrison is a Big Hit**

Marc Narducci

A residential community with plenty of family-oriented things to do, from antique shopping to local sports, that's Harrison Township, which headlines the list of the top 10 towns in Gloucester County, part of South Jersey Magazine's Top 25 Towns ranking. Getting its start in 1844 as Spicer Township, Harrison (which took that name the following year), comprised of its communities of Mullica Hill, Jefferson, Richwood and Ewan, sits on the edge of metropolis, just 30 miles from the hustle and bustle that is Philadelphia.

But what most Harrison residents speak of is the town's children, a source of town pride, the top-notch school system and the commitment to recreation programs that enrich their lives. Mayor Lou Manzo estimates 45 percent of the town's nearly 14,000 residents are 18 years old or younger.

"Our school system is one of the things we are most proud of," Manzo says. "The great thing is that the schools continue to get better and improve the curriculum."

Harrison makes the most of its open space and features two parks that are the heart of community involvement. The Ella Harris Park has several baseball fields, along with tennis courts, basketball courts and a huge pavilion where arts and crafts activities are enjoyed. Twice a year, the town hosts a 5K run with the proceeds going to town improvements, such as handicapped-accessible equipment at the park.

A second park features the newly finished William Wilt Soccer Complex, where you'll find a mile-long walking path and 10 soccer fields to accommodate the more than 900 youngsters in the town's soccer program. "We have needed so much more recreational space, and the soccer complex is our crown jewel," Manzo says.

Last summer, more than 400 youngsters ages 3-16 participated in the summer programs for arts and crafts and sports, according to recreation director Sharon Chew. An additional 160 were part of the multi-sports camps. This year a theater camp was added. Like a lot of towns in New Jersey, Harrison embraces its heritage and has an active historical society that helps bridge modern life to the past by putting its treasures and artifacts on display. For example, there is a one-room General Store, where you'll find items that date to the late 1800s. And in the Mullica Hill section, Main Street is lined with antique shops, a longtime point of interest that draws shoppers from as far as New York, Delaware and Pennsylvania. In fact, the entire Main Street area is on the National Historic Register of historic places.

"There is still that quaint feel, with the antique shops and now doll shops and cafes," Manzo said.

But Harrison is a place that's growing. And looking ahead, there are projects that will bring new businesses and 1,500 new homes to town over the next decade or so.

"We are trying to keep that old-town feel," Manzo said. "But we are also moving forward."

### **Tabernacle: Tops in Small Towns**

Looking for a small town that's scenic and laidback?

Then set your compass to green, and you'll invariably come to Tabernacle, which topped the list of South Jersey Magazine's Top 10 Small Towns, a subset of the publication's Top 25 Towns of South Jersey ranking.

A farm-community gem that draws folks far and wide for the delicious produce on farmstands and you-pick farms, Tabernacle is one of the reasons you call New Jersey the Garden State. Strawberries in the spring, blueberries and sweet corn in the summer, they're all hallmarks of the pastoral Burlington County town situated in the core of the Pinelands.

Bill Bell, the general manager of Cooperative Growers Association, an organization of farmers and greenhouse growers, made Tabernacle the home for his family 32 years ago. "I was growing up in Voorhees when it was all farms, but now it's all built up," Bell says. "I still consider myself a newcomer." Connecting Hammonton north to Trenton, two-lane Route 206 threads its way through Tabernacle in a blink-and-you'll-miss-it fashion, and there's just a pair of stoplights in town, one at a firehouse, the other at a drugstore.

Dotted with tiny housing developments, the 40-square-mile town was a community of only 2,000 residents about 30 years ago. It's now 7,100, a mix of the longtime inhabitants who farm its soils and the newcomers with more cosmopolitan tastes and jobs in Philadelphia and Cherry Hill.

Either way, the folks who live in Tabernacle appreciate the rural life that's still within reach of the shopping centers located in neighboring towns.

"We're small. We like it small. People ask me my vision for the next 10 years, I say I'd like see us the way we are now. We're happy with the laidback rural life," says Mayor Rick Franzen.

Franzen moved to town in 1972, drawn by its school system, which includes its own K-8 schools and constituency in the Lenape Regional High School District.

Like a lot of people in town, Franzen enjoys fishing for pickerel in the old cranberry bogs in the Pinelands. But there are other recreational opportunities, such as the two sports complexes for baseball and soccer programs, as well as tennis and basketball.

One thing you won't find, and that's a true downtown. "There's town hall, a cemetery, a farm market and a vacant lot. That's our downtown, and we like it that way," Franzen says.

### **Top 25 Towns**

For South Jersey Magazine's Top 25 Towns ranking, a composite score was produced from four key data factors: average residential property values, average property taxes paid, school quality and crime rates.

1. Haddonfield
2. Moorestown
3. Voorhees
4. Medford
5. Cherry Hill
6. Marlton
7. Mount Laurel
8. Southampton
9. Cinnaminson
10. Harrison Twp.
11. Pitman
12. Haddon Twp.
13. Mansfield

14. Washington Twp.
15. Waterford
16. Mantua
17. Woolwich
18. Monroe
19. Burlington Twp.
20. Delran
21. Lumberton
22. Florence
23. Westampton
24. Burlington City
25. West Deptford

### **Camden County Top 10**

Haddonfield  
Voorhees  
Cherry Hill  
Haddon Twp.  
Waterford

Collingswood  
Winslow  
Bellmawr  
Gloucester Township  
Gloucester City

**Burlington County Top 10**

Moorestown  
Medford  
Marlton  
Mount Laurel  
Southampton

Cinnaminson  
Mansfield  
Burlington Twp.  
Delran  
Lumberton

**Gloucester County Top 10**

Harrison Twp.  
Pitman  
Washington Twp.  
Mantua  
Woolwich

Monroe  
West Deptford  
Franklin Twp.  
Woodbury City  
Glassboro

**Top 10 Small Towns**

Tabernacle  
Gibbsboro  
Shamong  
Medford Lakes  
Elk Twp.

Chesterfield  
Springfield  
National Park Borough  
East Greenwich Twp.  
Haddon Heights

**Top 25 by Average Property Taxes Paid**

Haddonfield, Camden \$9,677  
Moorestown, Burlington \$8,587  
Medford, Burlington \$7,519  
Voorhees, Camden \$6,897  
Woolwich, Gloucester \$6,439  
Harrison Twp., Gloucester \$6,350  
Cherry Hill, Camden \$5,820  
Marlton, Burlington \$5,297  
Lumberton, Burlington \$5,176  
Delran, Burlington \$5,080  
Haddon Twp., Camden \$5,018  
Mansfield, Burlington \$4,922

Cinnaminson, Burlington \$4,823  
Washington Twp., Gloucester \$4,678  
Burlington Twp., Burlington \$4,663  
Monroe, Gloucester \$4,555  
Mantua, Gloucester \$4,521  
Woodbury City, Gloucester \$4,519  
Collingswood, Camden \$4,506  
Waterford Twp., Camden \$4,469  
Gloucester Twp., Camden \$4,417  
Pitman, Gloucester \$4,308  
Glassboro, Gloucester \$4,244  
Mount Laurel, Burlington \$4,220  
Audubon, Camden \$4,154

**Top 25 by Average Residential Property Values**

Voorhees, Camden \$340,743  
Mansfield, Burlington \$333,530  
Lumberton, Burlington \$320,337  
Burlington Twp., Burlington \$253,007  
Delran, Burlington \$233,908  
Haddonfield, Camden \$224,694

Moorestown, Burlington \$221,382  
Maple Shade, Burlington \$203,331  
Medford, Burlington \$201,237  
Harrison Twp., Gloucester \$193,419  
Woolwich, Gloucester \$180,686  
Westampton, Burlington \$148,384  
Marlton, Burlington \$147,710  
Southampton, Burlington \$145,375

Cinnaminson, Burlington \$141,504  
Mount Laurel, Burlington \$139,884  
Cherry Hill, Camden \$139,842  
Washington Twp., Gloucester \$129,715  
Mantua, Gloucester \$121,187  
Haddon Twp., Camden \$118,961

Monroe, Gloucester \$117,466  
Florence, Burlington \$117,248  
West Deptford, Gloucester \$116,887  
Franklin Twp., Gloucester \$116,652  
Waterford Twp., Camden \$114,433

### **Top 25 by Crime Rates**

Crime rates are expressed as a percentage of the number of crimes reported per 1,000 people; Rate goes from lowest to highest.

Medford, Burlington 12.5%  
Southampton, Burlington 12.6%  
Florence, Burlington 12.9%  
Pitman, Gloucester 14.1%  
Marlton, Burlington 15.8%  
Delran, Burlington 16.4%  
Woolwich, Gloucester 18.0%  
Waterford Twp., Camden 19.0%  
Harrison TWP., Gloucester 19.0%  
Mount Laurel, Burlington 19.3%  
Mansfield, Burlington 19.5%

Haddonfield, Camden 19.8%  
Franklin TWP., Gloucester 21.9%  
Burlington Twp., Burlington 22.4%  
Mantua, Gloucester 22.8%  
Burlington City, Burlington 22.9%  
Washington Township, Gloucester 23.6%  
Monroe, Gloucester 23.6%  
Bellmawr, Camden 23.7%  
Cinnaminson, Burlington 24.2%  
Moorestown, Burlington 24.4%  
Maple Shade, Burlington 25.1%  
West Deptford, Gloucester 25.2%  
Haddon Twp., Camden 25.6%  
Winslow, Camden 26.2%

**Top 25 By School Composite Score** School quality, expressed as a single score, was based on average SAT scores, the number of advanced placement tests offered, the percentage of students who go on to four-year schools, and the percentage of students who passed the statewide high school proficiency test. Low score equals best schools.

Moorestown, Burlington 3  
Voorhees, Camden 3  
Cherry Hill, Camden 3  
Haddonfield, Camden 3  
Medford, Burlington 5  
Marlton, Burlington 5  
Mount Laurel, Burlington 5  
Cinnaminson, Burlington 8  
Haddon Twp., Camden 8  
Southampton, Burlington 8  
Pitman, Gloucester 8  
Washington Twp., Gloucester 8  
Waterford Twp., Camden 9

Harrison Twp., Gloucester 9  
Mantua, Gloucester 9  
Monroe, Gloucester 9  
Woolwich, Gloucester 10  
Mansfield, Burlington 11  
Burlington Twp., Burlington 12  
Burlington City, Burlington 12  
Westampton, Burlington 13  
Lumberton, Burlington 13  
Florence, Burlington 13  
Delran, Burlington 13  
West Deptford, Gloucester 15



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**Author:** Editorial Staff--South Jersey Magazine